

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0212

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT ECON MP
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - MARCH 4

REF: PORT LOUIS 0171

SUMMARY: PORT LOUIS 0211 PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF THIS CABLE.

1. SEVERAL PAPERS REPORT THAT THE LABOR PARTY AND THE MAURITIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PMSD) HAVE AGREED TO RUN A "COMMON LIST" OF CANDIDATES IN THE APRIL 24 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. THE PRESS SAYS THIS DECISION WAS TAKEN OVER THE INTENSE OPPOSITION OF THE YOUTH WING OF LABOR, WHO TEND TO STRESS THE IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. THE COALITION PARTNERS BELIEVE A "COMMON LIST" CAN LIMIT THE MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM) TO WINNING A FEW SEATS IN PORT LOUIS ALONE. PMSD LEADER DUVAL SAYS THIS WILL OFFER THE ELECTORATE A CHOICE BETWEEN THE "MODERATES
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AND THE EXTREME LEFT." THE MMM'S BERENGER SAYS THE COMMON LIST WILL WORK TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE MMM, WHICH WILL ATTRACT ALL THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE "COALITION OF THE RIGHT." IF THE PMSD-LABOR ALLIANCE SUCCEEDS IN THE MUNICIPALS, THE PRESS SAYS, IT IS BOUND TO BE USED AGAIN AGAINST THE MMM IN GENERAL ELECTIONS. (IN 1969 THE PMSD-LABOR COALITION WON ALL SEATS IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, BUT THERE WAS NO

MMM IN THOSE DAYS.)

2. THE NEW ASSEMBLY HELD ITS FIRST SESSION ON MARCH 1. MMM MEMBERS POSED 36 QUESTIONS TO GOVERNMENT MINISTERS, INCLUDING MANY WITH OBVIOUS POLITICAL THRUST DESIGNED TO EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE WAS A QUESTION ABOUT USE OF OFFICIAL VEHICLES BY MINISTERS, ANOTHER ABOUT WHETHER GOVERNMENT FUNDS WERE USED TO PAY THE COST OF PRINTING IN INDIA A PRO-GOVERNMENT PAMPHLET DISTRIBUTED DURING THE DECEMBER ELECTION CAMPAIGN, HOW MANY DEVELOPMENT WORKS CORPORATION (DWC) WORKERS WERE HIRED IN THE THREE MONTHS PRIOR TO THE ELECTIONS, AND HOW MANY TAXI PERMITS WERE ISSUED IN THE SAME PERIOD. IN HIS RESPONSE RAMGOOLAM CLAIMED THE PAMPHLET HAD BEEN DESTINED FOR DISTRIBUTION AT THE OAU SUMMIT IN JULY BUT HAD BEEN DELAYED, AND HE LABELLED IT A NORMAL ACTIVITY OF THE INFORMATION MINISTRY. BUT HE ALSO REVEALED THAT IT HAD COST THE TAX-PAYERS 360,000 RUPEES, WHICH WILL NOT WIN ANY VOTES.

3. A YOUNG AND LESS THAN ARTICULATE LABOR DEPUTY NAMED PURRYAG WAS ASSIGNED THE JOB OF DEFENDING THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY STATEMENT IN THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE AT THE FIRST ASSEMBLY SESSION MARCH 1. PURRYAG DEMONSTRATED A STRONG SENSE OF INDEPENDENCE AS HE PROCEEDED TO GIVE BOTH THE GOVERNMENT'S DEFENSE AND THE OPPOSITION'S ATTACK IN THE SAME SPEECH. HE STRONGLY CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT FOR FAILURES IN NEARLY ALL AREAS OF ACTIVITY, WHILE EXCUSING IT ON THE BASIS THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULDN'T BE BLAMED FOR EVERYTHING THAT GOES WRONG, AND NEEDS TIME TO IMPLEMENT

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ITS PROGRAMS. HE BLAMED THE OPPOSITION MMM FOR SABOTAGING GOVERNMENT EFFORTS WITH THE AIR OF CAUSEING ITS DOWNFALL, THROUGH CIVIL SERVANTS WHO ARE MMM SYMPATHIZERS. HE STARTLED EVERYONE BY CRITICIZING THE FORMER OPPOSITION (THE PMSD, WHICH IS NOW IN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT WITH LABOR) FOR HAVING PURSUED A NEGATIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE POLICY, WHICH HAD CAUSED ITS ELECTORAL DEFEAT. HE WARNED THE MMM AGAINST FOLLOWING THE SAME COURSE. AT THE SAME TIME HE EXPRESSED HIS PERSONAL SUPPORT FOR MUCH OF THE MMM PROGRAM, INCLUDING NATIONALIZATION OF THE SCHOOLS AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT. THE MMM FRONT BENCH SMILED OFTEN DURING PURRYAG'S SPEECH.

4. LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION JUGNAUTH GAVE THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION REPLY. WHILE WELCOMING SOME GOVERNMENT PROMISES, HE ADVANCED THE MORE RADICAL FORMULAS OF THE MMM AS ALTERNATIVES. AFTER BEING PROVOKED BY THE LABOR BENCHES HE REVEALED, IN A HEATED EXCHANGE, THAT HE PMSD HAD APPROACHED THE MMM ABOUT A POSSIBLE COALITION RIGHT AFTER THE ELECTIONS, BUT HAD BEEN REJECTED. A COALITION PROPOSAL BY THE LABOR PARTY

HAD ALSO BEEN REJECTED BECAUSE LABOR WOULD NOT PROMISE TO INSTITUTE "TRUE SOCIALISM." JUGNAUTH'S REMARKS ON DIEGO GARCIA WERE REPORTED IN PORT LOUIS 193. BERENGER'S MAIDEN SPEECH WASH FORCEFUL, SARCASTIC, CLEVER AND SHORT (FOR HIM) AS THE SPEAKER CUT HIM OFF AFTER HE EXCEEDED THE 30 MINUTE TIME LIMIT, TO ALLOW THE MINISTERS HE WAS ATTACKING TIME TO REPLY. CURIOUSLY, BERENGER'S SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AFTER A MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT HAD BEEN ADOPTED. IT WAS MAINLY AN ATTACK ON THE PRICE INCREASES GRANTED THE BUS COMPANIES AND BAKERS.

5. COMMENT: THE FIRST ASSEMBLY ROUND WENT TO THE MMM. PURRYAG'S STRANGE SPEECH, WHICH COULD HARDLY HAVE BEEN CLEARED WITH THE LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP, GAVE THE IMPRESSION OF INDISCIPLINE AND DISORGANIZATION IN PARTY RANKS.
END COMMENT

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6. IN HIS LENTEN PASTORAL LETTER MONSIGNOR MARGEOT, CATHOLIC BISHOP OF PORT LOUIS, ADDRESSED THE PROBLEM OF RECONCILING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH WITH MARXIST IDEOLOGY, A QUESTION THAT HAS CAUSED A GOOD DEAL OF DISCUSSION IN THE PRESS SINCE THE STRONG SHOWING OF THE MMM IN THE DECEMBER ELECTIONS. THE MMM ENJOYED SOME CHRISTIAN SUPPORT, IT WOULD APPEAR. MARGEOT TRACED THE RECENT HISTORY OF THE CHURCH'S ATTITUDE TOWARD MARXISM AND NOTED THAT MARXISM HAS MANY "STREAMS" TODAY. HE SAID THE BEST WAY TO COMBAT MARXISM IS TO ELIMINATE THE ABUSES OF "LIBERAL CAPITALISM." HE SAID IT IS WRONG TO CONDEMN THOSE CHRISTIANS WHO WORK WITH THE MARXISTS TO FIGHT
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FOR JUSTICE AND AGAINST THE POWER OF MONEY AND ABUSES OF THE STRONG. STILL, HE WARNED AGAINST VIEWING THE CLASS STRUGGLE AS THE SOLE ENGINE OF HISTORY AND OF SLIDING INTO A VIOLENT AND TOTALITARIAN SOCIAL SYSTEM. MANY OF THE VALUES ADVOCATED BY MARXISTS -- JUSTICE, EQUALITY, HELPING THE POOR, RESTRAINING THE POWER OF MONEY, -- ARE CHRISTIAN VALUES, FOUND IN THE GOSPEL, AND SHOULD NOT BE DISCARDED JUST BECAUSE THE MARXISTS HAVE ADOPTED THEM, MARGEOT ARGUED. FINALLY, TO LABEL AS MARXISTS ALL THOSE WHO STRUGGLE FOR THE DIGNITY OF MAN, JUSTICE AND EQUALITY, RENDERS A DOUBLE SERVICE TO THE MARXISTS BY GIVING THEM THE PRESTIGE OF THE GOSPEL AND BY DENIGRATING THOSE WHO OFFER THE LAST ALTERNATIVE TO ATHEISM AND TOTALITARIANISM.

7. THE MMM'S LE MILITANT EXPRESSED ITS PLEASURE WITH THE BISHOP'S POSITION, WHICH IT CHARACTERIZED AS A "REFUSAL TO ANATHEMATIZE MARXISM," AND AS ADVOCATING A DIALOGUE WITH MARXISTS WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT THERE ARE POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN MARXIAN SOCIALISM IN WHICH THE VALUES OF THE

GOSPEL ARE FOUND. THE CONSERVATIVE CERNEEN EXAMINED THE SAME PASSAGES CAREFULLY AND PRAISED THE BISHOP FOR COMING OUT STRONGLY AGAINST ATHEISM, TOTALITARIANISM, DICTATORSHIP AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE BISHOP WAS SUCCESSFUL IN APPEALING TO ALL SIDES TO SOME DEGREE.
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8. THE GOVERNMENT HAS APPROVED A 15 PERCENT INCREASE IN THE PRICE OF BREAD AND A 10 PERCENT INCREASE FOR LOCALLY-PRODUCED MARGARINE, BOTH STAPLES OF THE ORDINARY MAURITIAN'S DAILY DIET. CONSUMERS WILL OBVIOUSLY NOT BE HAPPY, BUT THE INCREASES ARE PROBABLY NECESSARY BECAUSE OF HIGHER COSTS TO THE PRODUCERS.

9. FIFTY-TWO DEVELOPMENT WORKS CORPORATION (DWC) WORKERS WERE FIRED AFTER A SURPRISE VISIT TO THEIR PLACE OF WORK REVEALED THEY WERE PLAYING CARDS INSTEAD OF REPAIRING A FOOTBALL FIELD. THE MMM'S LE MILITANT COMMENTED THAT THEY WERE FIRED BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT NO LONGER NEEDS THEIR VOTES, ALLEGING THEY WERE HIRED BEFORE THE ELECTIONS IN A VOTE-BUYING MOVE. THE FOLLOWING DAY AN ADDITIONAL 135 DWC WORKERS WERE FIRED FOR NOT BEING AT THEIR PLACE OF WORK. (COMMENT: SEVERAL GOVERNMENT MINISTERS HAVE COMPLAINED PRIVATELY THAT THERE IS NO WORK FOR THESE PEOPLE TO DO AND THEY ARE A SERIOUS DRAIN ON THE BUDGET. THE FACT THAT THEY ARE PLAYING CARDS RATHER THAN WORKING OR NOT APPEARING AT ALL SEEMS TO CONFIRM THIS DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM.)
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